

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SINGAP 01243 170627Z  
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 SS-15 INR-10 /054 W  
-----020408 171859Z /72

R 170100Z MAR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9880  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 1243

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: SREF  
SUBJ: SINGAPORE TRANSIT CENTER FOR INDOCHINA REFUGEES;  
US GUARANTEES FOR BOAT REFUGEES

REF: (A) STATE 65484, (B) SINGAPORE 1084, (C) STATE 56947,  
(D) SINGAPORE 1158, (E) SINGAPORE 842

1. DCM CALLED ON MFA POLITICAL DIVISION DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
MUSHAHID ALI MARCH 16 TO DISCUSS REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP PROJECT.  
DCM ALSO RAISED PROBLEM OF USG GUARANTEES FOR REFUGEES PICKED  
UP BY U.S. VESSELS (REF D).

2. DRAWING ON REF C, DCM SAID THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE'S  
ORIGINAL OFFER OF REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP IN SINGAPORE HAD BEEN  
RECEIVED WITH GREAT INTEREST IN WASHINGTON. WE BELIEVED SUCH  
A CAMP WOULD MAKE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO EFFORTS TO COPE  
WITH REFUGEE PROBLEM. WE HAD BEEN FURTHER HEARTENED BY  
PRIME MINISTER'S PUBLIC REAFFIRMATION OF OFFER DURING HIS  
AUSTRALIA VISIT LAST MONTH. WHILE ACTION AGENCY IN THIS PROJECT  
WAS UNHCR, WE WERE ANXIOUS TO SEE IT IMPLEMENTED  
SOON AS POSSIBLE AND WERE SEEKING WAYS TO BE HELPFUL.

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PAGE 02 SINGAP 01243 170627Z

3. AS WE UNDERSTOOD IT, DCM CONTINUED, THERE HAD BEEN  
FEW IF ANY EXCHANGES BETWEEN UNHCR AND GOS ON THIS  
PROJECT SINCE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER MACE'S LETTER  
OF DECEMBER 30 TO GOS HOME MINISTER. (MUSHAHID ALI  
CONFIRMED THAT THIS WAS THE CASE.) SEEMS TO US THAT  
NEXT STEP MIGHT BE RESUMPTION OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN  
SINGAPORE AND UNHCR, TO FOCUS ON TANGIBLE PLANS FOR EARLY

OPENING OF TRANSIT CENTER. NEW UN HIGH COMMISSIONER HARTLING, DURING WASHINGTON VISIT LAST MONTH, HAD NOTED THAT UNHCR WAS STILL AWAITING RESPONSE TO MACE'S DECEMBER 30 LETTER. LOGICAL WAY TO GET THINGS MOVING, DCM SUGGESTED, MIGHT BE EARLY GOS REPLY TO THAT LETTER.

4. MUCHAHID ALI INDICATED THAT GOS HAS NOT BEEN UNDER IMPRESSION BALL WAS IN SINGAPORE'S COURT IN THIS MATTER. IN NUMBER OF CONVERSATIONS WITH VISITING AMERICAN OFFICIALS AND OTHERS OVER PAST FEW MONTHS, HE SAID, GOS HAD ATTEMPTED TO EXPLAIN IN DETAIL WHAT IT NEEDED IN WAY OF ADVANCE GUARANTEES TO PERMIT OPENING OF CENTER. PRIME MINISTER LEE HAD FURTHER DEFINED THESE NEEDS DURING HIS AUSTRALIAN VISIT. GOS HAD BEEN ASSUMING THAT THERE WOULD BE RESPONSE FROM OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES TO THESE COMMENTS. IF IT WOULD HELP, HOWEVER, HE WOULD SUGGEST THAT GOS CONSIDER REPLYING DIRECTLY TO MACE'S LETTER. HE WOULD LET US KNOW SHORTLY WHETHER THIS COULD BE DONE.

5. DCM REITERATED U.S. INTEREST IN ENCOURAGING EARLY POSITIVE ACTION TO IMPLEMENT TRANSIT CAMP PROJECT. NOTING THAT SUBJECT HAD BEEN DISCUSSED DURING VISIT OF SINGAPORE COUNTRY OFFICER MARK EASTON EARLIER THIS MONTH, MUSHAHID ALI INQUIRED WHETHER USG WOULD BE IN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SINGAP 01243 170627Z

POSITION TO OFFER SPECIFIC QUOTA OF REFUGEES IT WOULD BE PREPARED TO TAKE FROM CAMP. DCM REPLIED THAT WE WERE ACTIVELY STUDYING THIS QUESTION BUT THAT THERE WERE PROBLEMS WITH U.S. LAWS WHICH MADE SUCH BLANKET GUARANTEES VERY DIFFICULT. MUSHAHID ALI REITERATED THAT SINGAPORE'S DOMINANT CONCERN WAS THAT IT NOT BE SADDLED WITH LONG-TERM REFUGEE POPULATION. SOME METHOD WOULD HAVE TO BE FOUND, HE SAID, TO INSURE THAT NO REFUGEES WOULD REMAIN IN SINGAPORE CAMP LONGER THAN LIMITED PERIOD SUGGESTED BY PRIME MINISTER. DCM WONDERED WHETHER PROBLEM COULD BE RESOLVED BY INITIALLY LIMITING SIZE OF CAMP POPULATION TO FIXED NUMBER ON TRIAL BASIS. MUSHAHID ALI WAS NON-COMMITTAL.

6. DCM THEN TURNED TO QUESTION OF GUARANTEES REQUIRED BY SINGAPORE FROM OTHER GOVERNMENTS IN ORDER TO DISEMBARK REFUGEES PICKED UP AT SEA BY THEIR VESSELS. HE NOTED THAT IMPASSE SEEMED TO BE DEVELOPING, IN THAT USG WAS REQUIRED BY LAW TO USE LANGUAGE IN ITS GUARANTEE WHICH GOS OFFICIALS HAD FOUND UNSATISFACTORY. HE FEARED THAT ARRIVAL OF NEXT U.S. FLAG VESSEL BEARING REFUGEES WOULD LEAD TO PROBLEM IF GOS WAS NO LONGER

ABLE TO ACCEPT GUARANTEE WHICH HAD HITHERTO BEEN SATIS-  
FACTORY. HE EXPLAINED DETAILS OF PROBLEM AS OUTLINED  
REF E. MUSHAHID ALI SAID THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN AWARE  
OF THIS PARTICULAR PROBLEM, AND AGREED TO LOOK INTO IT.

7. COMMENT: IF GOS DOES RESPOND TO UNHCR DECEMBER 30  
LETTER, THIS SHOULD HELP TO ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVE  
OF GETTING THE TWO TO BEGIN CONCRETE DISCUSSION ON  
ESTABLISHING REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP. GOS, HOWEVER,  
CLEARLY IS NOT BUDGING FROM ITS REQUEST FOR SPECIFIC  
ADVANCED GUARANTEES BEFORE ADMITTING REFUGEES. WE  
WONDER IN THIS CONNECTION WHETHER IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE  
FOR US TO AGREE IN ADVANCE TO HOLD A CERTAIN NUMBER OF IPP-78  
NUMBERS FOR USE IN SINGAPORE, TO BE LIMITED TO THOSE PICKED  
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PAGE 04 SINGAP 01243 170627Z

UP AT SEA BY MERCHANT  
VESSELS. THIS MIGHT OBVIATE PROBLEM OF OFFERING GUARANTEES  
TO SINGAPORE THAT WE ARE UNABLE TO OFFER TO MALAYSIA AND  
THAILAND. WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS.  
HOLDRIDGE

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## Message Attributes

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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
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20 Mar 2014  
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